



John Muir Correspondence (PDFs)

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1890-10-24

**Letter from John Muir to [Robert Underwood] Johnson, 1890 Oct 24.**

John Muir

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**Recommended Citation**

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Martinez Oct 24. 1890

my dear Johnson.

I mean to start on  
the Kings River Yosemite next  
Monday the 2. inst. to take another  
trip into the Canon & gather  
fresh facts for that article  
you want. I hope to have  
the m.s. ready by December  
unless something unusual  
prevents. I saw Robinson  
the other day. He wants to borrow  
money, but does not seem to  
be earning much. I doubt think  
the sketches he showed me for  
the Kings R. Yo. are very telling  
I'll send some of my own

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2  
Have got off the most  
valuable of the grapes but  
200 tons or so yet remain  
on the vines. I shall leave  
others to look after them as  
much as possible. Dr Strutzel  
my father-in-law is in very poor  
low health & I have to help  
in disposing of his crop of  
grapes also.

I hope to get a lawyer to go with  
me into the Canon & will ask  
him about the description of  
the proposed reservation.

As for Irish his case is hopeless  
& I don't mean to answer him  
at all. His moral sense seems to  
have given way & sloughed off in

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other ruin & rottenness like a  
stranded jellyfish trampled &  
decomposed. To argue with a  
dead man would be more  
hopeful labor than with John P.

As to the sawmill business

In the spring of 1868 I made my  
first visit to the valley wh. lasted  
8 or 10 days, then returned to the  
San Joaquin plains & worked in  
the harvest field to earn a little  
money. In the fall being anxious  
to see more of the valley I returned  
to it just before winter set in walking  
all the way up the mountains. I wanted  
to stay in the valley all winter for  
the sake of seeing it in its crystal  
garb & was therefore anxious to obtain

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work. Mr Hutchings had built  
a small sawmill to get lumber  
for the cottages that are still  
standing about the old hotel. But  
the mill would not work. While  
I was camped in the valley Mr  
Hutchings came to my fire one  
night & asked me whether I knew  
anything about mills. I told him I  
was a millwright. He then requested  
me to look at his mill & tell him  
whether or ~~no~~ I could make it  
work. Next day I told him the  
water wheel & the machinery in general  
would have to be made over again.  
He then prevailed on me to undertake  
the job. at \$90<sup>00</sup> per month & board.  
I put in new machinery of the simplest  
kind, & by the end of winter had made



a few thousand <sup>35</sup> feet of lumber  
I continued to run the mill for  
two or three seasons. working only  
in time of high water. One of the  
large mills on Puget Sound cuts  
more lumber in half a day than  
I sawed in all these years.  
A year or two before I entered  
the valley a tremendous wind storm  
blew down a considerable number  
of the large yellow pines & it was  
from these fallen trees that the mill  
logs were obtained. I never cut  
down a single tree in the valley or  
sawed one cut down by others as  
far as I know. This is all there  
is by way of foundation for the  
statement that I was making lumber  
for sale out of 40 groves.

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I never had the slightest pecuniary  
interest in this or any other  
mill. All this was done with-  
the consent & approval of Clark  
the Guardian as far as I know.  
He frequently came to the mill  
& expressed admiration for its  
simplicity & cheapness praising  
me as a great genius. He joined  
me on several of my excursions  
& was always devotedly friendly. So  
much for John Muir & his mill  
being hastily driven out of Yosemite  
ere he had completed the destruction  
of its trees. After I left the mill  
I had earned money enough to go  
on with my studies without interruption  
the mill was operated for several  
years. It was while running

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This little mill that Emerson  
visits on climbing a slanting  
plank to my nest like study is  
the gable over the stream -

But remember this is for  
you only - none of it to be  
published. Life is too short for  
defense of character - mine is not  
worth so much trouble anyhow  
& has nothing to do with you.

Here are some photos  
all I have -

Ever cordially<sup>N</sup>  
your friend  
John Muir

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